

JIM'S UGLIES

IN DARK CRYSTAL, MUPPET MAN JIM HENSON PUTS SOME UNLIKELY HEROES IN A CASTLE.



JIM HENSON, a film-maker who says he thinks like an artist, has his own way of proving how we can be optimistic about our mixed-up world.

The millionaire creator of *The Muppets* has made a fantasy film where good and evil learn to co-exist.

The Dark Crystal, Henson's celluloid allegory, is peopled by outlandish characters (instead of real people) who reflect his devotion to art.

In the film, imaginary characters trip across a fairytale landscape.

There's the goodies, called Mystics, and the baddies (Skeksis), with another character — Gelfling — getting the world all together again.

Jim said that *The Dark Crystal* is not necessarily a children's film.

• **BELOW:** One of Henson's unlikely heroes in the clash between good and evil. **BOTTOM:** A reptilian Froud/Henson character living in an elegant castle. **RIGHT:** Puppetry — a pure form of theatre, as seen in Henson's fantasy film.

"In fact I think some children could be frightened of it," he said.

"In America, it's got a parental guidance rating, but you have to do the kind of film you believe in.

"But I know families of adults and children who have seen it and liked it."

Jim originally thought of the idea in 1975 as not only an entertaining movie, but also a personal statement.

"I had this image of these terribly ugly reptilians living in a wonderfully elegant castle dressed in fine brocades," he said.

He consulted Brian Froud, an illustrator, who later became the conceptual designer, and the two of them worked on the idea together.

A bearded Jim — in Australia to promote *The Dark Crystal* (his third film and his first as director) — has made a fortune out of puppets.

As creator of *The Muppets*, he has won the hearts and minds of millions of people, yet, puppetry was never a grand passion when he was younger.

It wasn't until he started working in American TV in the early Fifties that he stumbled on puppetry and discovered the appeal of the Muppets.

"Puppetry is a pure form of theatre and goes back as long as theatre itself," he said.

Jim says he's slightly idealistic and probably visionary.

"It's also a lot of fun to create another believable world — not as an escape, but as positive fun.

"While actors can communicate more, the audience has to meet the puppet performance half way," said Jim. "It calls for more audience participation."

— PAULYNE POGORELSKE

